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Justice on Earth: Earthjustice and the People it has Served

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Sometimes a legal team can make a critical difference in whether a species becomes extinct, whether children's blood lead levels rise, whether the largest, oldest trees are allowed to stand. This book describes the last decade of legal battles for Earthjustice, the nonprofit legal team formerly known as the Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund.

From the history of trade law to the hydrological relationship of taro and sugar in Hawaiian agriculture, the author, a seasoned environmental writer, presents the complex story of each case with humor and clarity.

Pointing out that, increasingly, the legal action is but one component of an effective campaign, Turner carefully describes the citizens groups that formed around each issue. CANT (Citizens Against Nuclear Trash), for example, successfully blocked an extremely hazardous uranium enrichment plant from locating in their poor, rural, African-American Louisiana community.

This book is a sequel to Wild by Law (1989) which described the first two decades of the Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund. Much has changed in environmental law in the last decade. Where Earthjustice used to work to save places, the struggles now are largely over restoring places. Several recent campaigns have focused on holding government regulatory agencies to their job descriptions.

Beautiful photography and watercolor maps illustrate each story. The book ends with ominous warnings that the politicization of judicial appointments and secret international trade courts are making legal action more difficult. If these trends continue, writes Turner, the sequel to Justice on Earth will be much slimmer and much sadder.

This book is about history as well as law and the environment; it is an important work for those interested in the evolving role of legal campaigns within the environmental movement. It offers, in elegant form, the lessons to be learned from struggles to save and restore the commons.